15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
OI17 Murngin OI17

nonchalantly remarked that when bush-rats spoiled most of the stores, they bartered fish, wallaby, and lily-seeds from nomads. [197]

We saw white-washed aboriginal cottages built from locally burnt shell-lime, stones and ant-bed that had been standing for twenty years. Weird outlines of hands were in a number of bark huts, and an old nomad explained that when they 'go bush' they leave the mark of a hand in the house of a friend. Imprints are made by chewing moistened clay and spraying it from the mouth over a hand outstretched on the bark. When the hand is removed its outline remains in the centre of the white clay. [201]

Indifferent land had been cultivated, and in good seasons yielded tapioca, sweet-potatoes, coconuts, and bananas. [241] Nomads work in the gardens during the wet season and also collect bêche-de-mer from the mud-flats for export. [226] Women weave baskets, fans, and trays from wild pandanus palm, [439] and these are marketed for them by the mission. [285]

At Goulburn Island I met some of the young Fijians who work on all these stations. Kolinio was a giant, a carpenter by trade and the son of a chief. He introduced me to the satisfying juice of the green coconut by gashing a lip in the soft shell of a green nut and handing it to me brimming with cold, exquisitely flavoured liquid. It has been inadequately likened to cold lemonade. Fijians get on well with aborigines and perhaps their colour is a link rather than a bar. They are born agriculturists, but need to unlearn a lot when they come from their fertile islands to desolate monsoonal Arnhem Land. [177]

Milingimbi was at that time the end of the lugger trip. It is one of the many low scrub-covered islands and mud-flats known as the Crocodile Islands, yet within thirty miles of Milingimbi there is the densest Yulengor population in Arnhem Land. In 1918 this mission was begun as an extension of that at Goulburn Island. The advance seems [161]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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ground and cultivating and planting crops. Payment in the form of flour and tobacco was made for all work done, and the principle of 'no work—no pay' was strictly adhered to. Agriculture was an economic necessity in assisting them to develop from a nomadic existence to a communal life. Pay was later in the form of food grown on the station; in this way they became self-supporting, and profits were automatically returned to them. 797 464

When the time came for planting it seemed ridiculous to the nomad to bury good sweet-potatoes instead of eating them, for the relationship between seed and harvest had not occurred to them. About three months later, when the first crops were still immature I was surprised one morning to find that they had been scratched out and eaten. Two months of hard clearing and three months of cultivating had gone overnight. Disappointing as it was, the people could hardly be blamed, for it was against all their experience to leave good food to mature. For centuries, stray coconuts had drifted from the East Indies to the shores of Arnhem Land, but none took root, for this unexpected harvest from the sea was eagerly seized and eaten. Nomads consume all edible food at hand, and in bush life rarely wait for yams, fruit, and berries to ripen. Food is scarce, and they instinctively make the most of anything they find. I have seen them bring loads of popular cashew nuts into camp, stripping the trees and smashing their wide shady branches in an effort to get the last of the crop, and then gorge the nuts through day and night till all have been eaten. On rare occasions a number of turtle are caught, and though some could be kept alive and eaten later, they are killed at once, and the camp feasts and sleeps intermittently till the catch is finished. 797 85 [241] [261] [262]

We tried to explain that cows and goats were kept for their milk and not for meat, but nomads found it hard to sit and tend them day by day and yard them at night, when each [231]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957.
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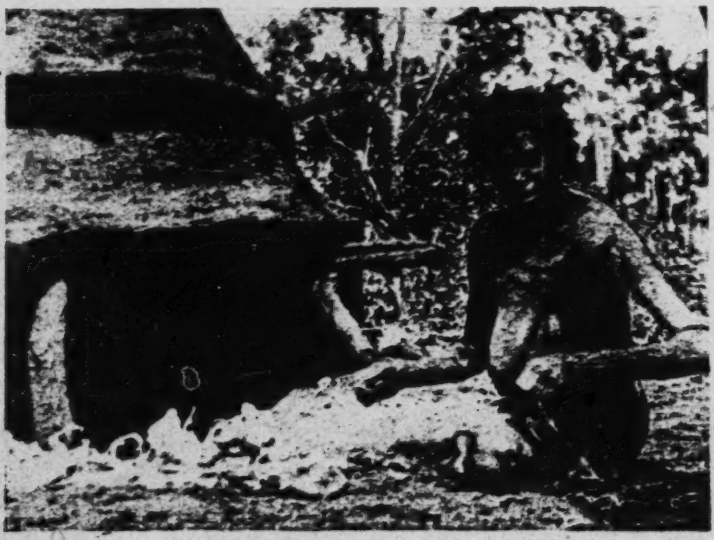
AT YIRRKALA

Yulengor clearing land for gardens

142
342
516
283



WET-SEASON HUT OF BARK SHEETS

The woman is making string from bark fibre

[facing p 23]